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Next CSUN Head to Face Festering Problems

■ Campus: Wilson successor will need to complete quake repairs and fill key administrative jobs.

By MIGUEL BUSTILLO
Times Staff Writer

Whoever leads Cal State Northridge following the sudden resignation Tuesday of President Blenda J. Wilson will assume a lengthy list of festering problems and half-finished priorities from completing the rebuilding of the quake-damaged campus to restoring order to depleted administrative ranks.

But it remained unclear Tuesday whether the person next facing these challenges will be an interim successor or permanent replacement. Wilson will continue at the university until the end of the spring semester.

CSUN is already down two vice presidents following the recent resignations of Ron Kopita, who stirred controversy over his handling of the athletic department, and Arthur J. Elbert, who oversaw rebuilding of the campus after previous administrators became embroiled in scandal.

Kopita incurred the wrath of residents and student leaders two years ago when he went fishing after CSUN announced it would eliminate the men's baseball, volleyball, soccer and swimming programs rather than raise money to meet gender-equity requirements.

All the sports were eventually restored following an outcry by alumni and local political leaders. Elbert, who left to join the Cal State University Chancellor's office, was brought in to replace Bill and Jane Chatham, the couple formerly heading post-quake reconstruction efforts. They became mired in several controversies, including the disclosure in The Times that quake-repair contractors did free work on their Northridge home.

Both positions are now being filled by interim vice presidents. The university is also operating with an interim athletic director, Sam Jankovich, who was brought in after the former athletic director, Paul Bala, resigned last year, a week after former women's basketball coach Michael Abraham was indicted on charges of conspiracy to distribute crack cocaine.

Keith Richmond, part of a committee searching for a permanent athletic director to recommend to Wilson, said he hoped the panel's work would not be cast aside now that she is moving on.

"I hope that the progress we have made as a task force will not be forgotten at the university," Richmond said. "In three uncertainty following the resignation of the president? Sure."

Certainly, there are concerns that direction will change in the future," he added. "There are questions about the hiring of the new athletic director. Those concerns are true throughout the university, with the vice president positions."

CSUN spokesman John Chandler said it remained to be seen whether Cal State officials would allow the three administrative positions to be filled quickly, or would await the hiring of a new president.

"Depending on how things happen, these may or may not be issues come the end of the spring semester," Chandler said. "Do we have an interim president or a new president? That is the first issue. We may have a better sense by the end of the week."

The new president will also have to make an important decision regarding a plan to build a new 8,500-seat football stadium—a plan that has encountered significant opposition from neighbors.

A committee formed to decide whether the stadium should be built on campus, a plan opposed by four homeowner groups, or miles away in Woodland Hills declined to choose, passing the buck instead to the president's office. Wilson has

yet to receive a report on the dual proposals, Chandler said.

And although CSUN has rebuilt or repaired many of the 107 structures damaged during the 1994 Northridge earthquake, which caused \$380 million in damage on the campus, many projects are still underway.

Among the projects still unfinished are reconstructing the adjoining wings of the (Civic Library), building a new administration complex, a new Health and Human Development College headquarters/technology center, and College of Arts, Media and Communication building.

The library is expected to be rebuilt by the start of the fall semester, while the other projects are all expected to be done by 2000.

Other issues facing the next head of CSUN include overseeing plans by Sylmar-based entrepreneur Alfred Mann to develop an \$85-million biotechnology complex in the North Campus area for his firm MMed, a maker of insulin pumps.

The plan, which has received final approval, is expected to bring the university \$22.5 million over the 42 years of the lease.

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WILSON: New Job to Focus on Reform

Continued from A13A
dation, with a reported \$55 million in assets, Wilson will take a national role in education reform. The organization was created last year after a 1996 federal law allowed nonprofit, student-loan organizations to give money to charity.

The foundation's stated purpose is to disburse grants "to promote accessibility, quality and effectiveness of education from preschool through post-secondary levels... especially underserved populations."

Kennedy said Wilson will look forward to spending time with her elderly parents, who live in the Northeast.

Mixed Reaction From Students, Faculty

On campus Tuesday, some students and faculty members praised Wilson for shepherding the university toward the new millennium, while others expressed hope that CSUN's public image would improve once she left.

"She's a super leader, especially to the African American community," said O.B. McClinton, vice president of CSUN's Black Student Union.

Geography professor Julie Latty said Wilson had done a good job raising the university's profile, but said she had perhaps overlooked campus issues in the process.

"She was disconnected from basic aspects of student, faculty and staff life," Latty said. "I did not get the impression that Blenda Wilson had any significant interest in academics."

Toni Hart, a graduate student, said Wilson brought "the campus to a higher level, and [got] more respect for it."

Times staff writers Kenneth Wilson, Henry MacGregor, Agnes Diggs and Eric Sundstrider contributed to this story.



Blenda J. Wilson will tackle national education reform in her new post.

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